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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether teachers perceived their school principals as using empowering-type activities. The study focused on differences according to such factors as age, gender, and school grade and size. Researchers examined the survey responses from graduate students in the Educational Leadership Program at Northeast Louisiana University in 1999. Participating students were full-time teachers taking evening courses at the university. Students completed a survey entitled Principal Profile, which asked them to rate their principals' performance and focused on empowering-type activities. Data analysis indicated that principals utilized empowering type activities to some degree. There were no significant differences between such groupings as older versus newer and male versus female administrators or teachers. The Principal Profile is appended. (SM)

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE USE OF "EMPOWERING-TYPE ACTIVITIES" BY THEIR BUILDING PRINCIPALS

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Teachers' Perceptions of the Use of "Empowering-type Activities"

by Their Building Principals

Introduction

As improvement of student academic performance in U. S. schools continues to be of intense concern, various types of restructuring and reform are being instituted in our schools to bring about the desired improvement. Along with these changes often comes "heavy handed," even punitive, accountability measures. It seems that often these efforts to restructure and reform are ill-conceived, political, and have little grounding in what research has revealed.

Ever since 1989, when six national goals were established for American education, there has been a National agenda to improve student academic performance. In 1991 President Bush and Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander took these goals and developed the America 2000 plan. They sought to bring local communities into the process of making the accomplishment of these goals a community concern. In 1994 President Clinton continued in the same venue by signing the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. After the adoption of these Goals our government and much of our citizenry had aspirations of being number one in the world in mathematics and science achievement by the year 2000 (one of the 8 goals). Along with this goal were several others that were equally unrealistic. Perhaps these governmental initiatives of the past decade were the beginning of the unrealistic expectations that have been laid on the backs of schools and educators.

Are there ways of improving what is going on within our schools, which is now a National imperative, without the drastic changes being imposed? Most educators would readily admit that the practices we use are not always the best that we know. Often this is because of time or money constraints, but it also might be because of the natural resistance to change, politics, and the desire to "ride it out" ("And this to shall soon

pass."). It is obvious that the reform efforts and imposed accountability has "come down from the top." As educators, and those who study human behavior and motivation, we should know that this type of approach is rarely successful in eliciting ownership and support from those who must carry out the mandates. With the use of imposed or "coercive" power come responses which are more inclined toward hostility and aggression rather than embracing and supporting.

Power is often defined: getting someone to do something they "don't want" to do. Wouldn't it be better to use empowerment, which might be defined as getting someone to do something they "want" to do? There is abundant evidence to show that teachers and others respond well to the use of activities/approaches that will provide ownership and the accompanying responsibility. It appears that this type of approach is rarely used with the present reform efforts. When teachers have to accept their own lack of power, especially with the many mandates that go along with many accountability measures, and also autocratic school leaders, their potential for improved performance and job satisfaction is diminished. Lightfoot (1986) said empowerment builds teacher commitment and involvement. Frase & Sorenson (1992) said that what was lost (when teachers were not empowered) was the creativity, commitment, and energy that teachers could be contributing to the school organization. Short & Greer (1997) discussed in-depth the many benefits of empowering teachers in their work on empowered schools.

Changes in our society, especially during the past ten years, require that school leaders have different competencies, or at least modification of competencies, if they are to be effective (Kaiser, 1995). Research indicates that schools are rarely effective that have poor leadership, yet Thurston, Clift, and Schacht (1993) indicated that there had only been a few isolated refinements of leadership training programs and little fundamental reform in how administrators were prepared to do their very important jobs. Bartell (1994) indicated that the school principal has a powerful impact upon the success or failure of a school.

Kochan & Spencer (1999) found in their research that principals indicated that their jobs had become increasingly complex and many would be retiring within the next ten years. Principals also indicated that those who would fill their positions would need a myriad of competencies. One could speculate that this finding may be indicative that many of those "older" principals may not have the competencies or the leadership styles which would allow them to empower staff in an effort to be responsive to the changes involved in the various reforms. Short and Greer (1997) indicated that the principal's leadership style and management skills effect both the culture and climate of the school.

There has been considerable discussion in the literature about the role of leaders in effective schools. Johnson & Johnson (1984) indicated that effective schools research has promoted changes in the "perceived" role of the school principal. In the past the principal was often a teacher with little or no knowledge of school administration; today the opposite seems true. In fact, principals may have limited knowledge of the technology of teaching; yet, many expect today's principal to be the "instructional leader" in the school. There are some who question seriously whether or not the principal should be the "instructional leader" of the school.

It seemed important to the researchers to inquire about the implementation of change and acceptance of various reform efforts at the "individual school" level? What are our principals doing to facilitate reform? Even though there seems to be a lack of consensus in the literature regarding the roles of today's and tomorrow's principals, it seems well accepted that they are and will be expected to do new and different things. Glickman (1990) said future administrators would have to use what time they had more efficiently and equitably and this implied the utilization of non-traditional approaches to staff supervision and other areas of responsibility.

If the empowerment of staff is seen as a way to obtain greater performance by teachers, as they may be afforded ownership with the resulting responsibility, have principals been trained to provide empowerment for teachers? It would seem that many

of "today's training programs" recognize the need for training about the value of empowerment and consequently provide such preparation. It also seems evident, if one would consider the reports of students who are presently teachers, that administrators from past training programs did not receive such training and/or do not chose to share power. Student comments would also lead one to believe that many of those who had training relative to the advantages of empowerment choose not to use such approaches.

Problem

There have been numerous studies and surveys relating to the importance of teacher empowerment in schools. Effective leadership behavior in schools has also been addressed by a wealth of research. This research sought to determine if the principals who were leading our schools were perceived as using "empowering-type" activities. The research also investigated other questions relative to teachers' perceptions of their school principals.

Research Questions

The researchers sought to answer the following questions.

1. Are perceptual ratings given to items related to empowering-type activities significantly lower than those given to other items related to administrative activity?
2. Are younger principals perceived as providing more empowering-type activities than older principals?
3. Are female principals perceived as providing more empowering-type activities than male principals?
4. Are principals of elementary schools perceived as providing more empowering-type activities than junior high/middle school or high school principals?
5. Are those principals in smaller schools perceived as providing more empowering-type activities than those in larger schools?
6. Does the age of the teacher influence their perception of the principal's use of empowering-type activities?

7. Does the gender of the teacher responding influence their perception of the principal's use of empowering-type activities?

Participants and Design

The research was conducted utilizing the survey responses of graduate students in the Educational Leadership Program at Northeast Louisiana University (now the University of Louisiana at Monroe) during the spring, summer, and fall sessions of 1999. Students surveyed were full-time teachers who were taking evening courses. Students in the Program are typically from a 15 parish area in north Louisiana. Students were asked to complete a survey entitled Principal Profile (Appendix) which asked them to rate items relative to their principal's performance. Student's names or other identifying data were not required. The "Profile" had 134 items, the first 103 of which were to be rated using a 5 point scale with 5 being "outstanding," 4 being "clearly above average," 3 being "average," 2 being "clearly below average," and 1 being "unacceptable." The last 31 items were not used in this study. Those 25 items (within the 103) that were identified by the researchers as "empowering-type activities" were statistically investigated. A mean response was determined for the other 78 items on the Profile but they had no additional statistical treatment.

Statistical Treatment

A mean was established for the 78 items on the Profile which were not selected as items related to empowering-type activities. This mean was tested, using a t-test for Equality of Means, to determine if it was significantly different from the mean of the 25 items relating to empowering-type activities. The mean for the 25 selected items was then used on a comparative basis with each of the 25 individual items. The range of means for the 25 selected items was from 1.28 to 5.00 with a mean of 3.37. Using a 95% confidence interval of the differences a t-test for Equality of Means and Levene's Test for Equality of Variances were calculated for each set of data identified in the research questions.

Demographic Data

Data was gathered so that the 25 items utilized from the Profile could be examined relative to the sex of the principal, the age of the principal, the sex of the rater, the age of the rater, the grade level, and the school enrollment. Table 1 shows the gender of the subjects and whether they were principals or assistant principals. It should be noted that the latter two categories were combined for the statistical analysis.

Table 1.

Subject Gender and Title

Male	Female	No Response	Total	Principal	Assistant Principal	No Response	Total
31	24	1	66	63	2	1	66

Table 2 shows the ages of the subjects.

Table 2.

Subject Age

Under 30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Over 60	No Response	Total
1	5	23	31	4	2	66

Table 3 shows the gender of the participants who completed the Profile.

Table 3.

Participant Gender

Male	Female	No Response	Total
12	51	3	66

Table 4 shows the ages of the participants who completed the Profile.

Table 4.

Participant Age

Under 30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Over 60	No Response	Total
10	22	25	2		7	66

Table 5 shows the number of school organizational types of the subjects/participants.

Table 5.

School Organization

Elementary	Jr. High/ Middle School	High School	Other	Total
34	11	15	6	66

Table 6 shows the school enrollments of the subjects/participants.

Table 6.

School Enrollment

Under 250	251-500	501-750	751-1000	1001-1500	Over 1500	No Response	Total
17	18	19	4	5	2	1	66

Findings

The findings are reported relative to each research question posed.

1. Are the perceptual ratings given to the items related to empowering-type activities significantly lower than those given to other items related to administrative activity?

There was no significant difference in the mean of empowering-type activities (3.37) and the mean of the other 78 items (3.39) on the Principal Profile survey.

2. Are younger principals perceived as providing more empowering-type activities than older principals?

Respondents' mean in each age group was compared with that of each of the other age groups. No significant differences between groups or from the mean were found. It was noted that the lowest mean (3.07) was found in the largest group, those 31 principals who were in the 51-60 age group.

3. Are female principals perceived as providing more empowering-type activities than male principals?

Respondents' mean for each of the two gender groups was compared. No significant difference between the two groups was found

4. Are principals of elementary schools perceived as providing more empowering-type activities than junior high/middle school or high schools?

The mean for each group was as follows: elementary (3.38), junior high/middle school (3.33), and high school (3.34). No significant differences were noted.

5. Are principals in smaller schools perceived as providing more empowering-type activities than those in larger schools?

Principals in smaller schools were not perceived as providing more empowering-type activities than those in larger schools. No significant difference existed between the group mean and the mean of any of the individual enrollment sizes.

6. Does the age of the teacher responding influence their perception of the principal's use of empowering-type activities?

Statistically, the age of the teacher responding had no significant influence on their perception of their principal.

7. Does the gender of the teacher responding influence their perception of principal's use of empowering-type activities?

The gender of the teacher responding was not statistically significant relative to their rating of their principal.

Conclusions and Discussion

Even though it would be difficult to say that a mean score of 3.37 on the empowering-type activities was indicative that principals "were" utilizing such activities, the data and its statistical treatment did not support the premise that principals "were not" utilizing empowering-type activities. Even though teachers informally contend that administrators do not utilize empowering activities/approaches, the analysis of the data in this study did not support such a contention. Perhaps teachers would just like to have more input and more opportunity to share in making decisions on items, especially when they are stakeholders.

The data also would not support hypotheses relative to differences that may have been perceived to exist between such groupings as older versus newer and male versus female administrators; this is difficult to explain. Even though it would appear that younger administrators and perhaps female administrators would provide more empowering type activities, such was not supported.

It should be noted that it is not unusual for respondents to such instruments to "halo" their responses. Respondents often fear that the information they provide might identify them and be used against them in some way. It was also noted in this survey that those who gave high ratings to their administrators in the empowerment area also gave high ratings in the other areas and conversely those who gave low ratings gave low ratings throughout.

Recommendations for Further Study

Further research is planned using all 134 items on the Principal Profile. Each area will be examined to see if there are perceived weaknesses or strengths relative to the mean (positive items) for the entire Profile. Administrators have expressed interest in such an instrument that might be used as part of an assessment technique to be used for principals to help determine areas perceived by their faculties as needing attention and areas of strength.

It is planned to administer the instrument to an identified faculty and their principal so that reliability can be tested and the principal's perceptions can be compared with the faculty's perceptions. The instrument will also be further refined to include numbering for each item and some items will be improved and re-written.

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APPENDIX

Principal Profile

PRINCIPAL PROFILE

This instrument is to be used to obtain a comprehensive assessment of teacher and/or principal perception of various aspects of the building principal's/assistant principal's performance and personal qualities. It is hoped that the information obtained can be used as direction for professional growth for specific individuals and improvement in preparation programs. Please provide the following demographic data but do not provide your name. Individual teachers responding are not to be identified in any way.

The person being assessed is: Principal ___ Asst. Prin. ___ **They are:** Male ___ Female ___
Their approximate age is: Under 30 ___ 31-40 ___ 41-50 ___ 51-60 ___ Over 60 ___
I am: Male ___ Female ___ **And:** Under 30 ___ 31-40 ___ 41-50 ___ 51-60 ___ Over 60 ___

Grade Level:
___ Elementary
___ Junior High/Middle School
___ High School
___ Other _____

Approximate schools enrollment:
___ Under 250
___ 251- 500
___ 501- 750
___ 751- 1000
___ 1001- 1500
___ Above 1500

Please rate using the following scale: 5=outstanding, 4=clearly above average, 3=average, 2=clearly below average, 1=unacceptable

Management

___ Accessible to staff and others
___ Keeping us informed
___ Visibility in the school setting
___ Uses a minimum of instructional time for non-instructional tasks thus maximizing time on task
___ Working effectively with the central (superintendent's) office
___ Emphasizing staff productivity (on-task behavior by staff)
___ Taking positions which are most beneficial to the school (on issues)
___ Communicating clearly the vision or mission of the school
___ Monitoring classroom performance by teachers
___ Monitoring student performance and conduct
___ Managing support staff (non-teachers)
___ Managing school facilities
___ Managing school finance
___ Managing equipment and supplies
___ Providing needed resources for staff
___ Providing time for faculty to work collaboratively on curriculum, etc.
___ Administering discipline effectively
___ Letting others know what is expected of them
___ Providing instructional leadership
___ Supporting excellence in the performance of staff
___ Providing for beneficial staff-development activities
___ Demonstrating high expectations for self and others
___ Providing leadership in curriculum development
___ Providing a pleasant, safe, and orderly climate for learning

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Relationships

___ Shows consideration for staff ("staff" includes teachers and support personnel)
___ Provides praise and recognition for staff
___ Senses the temper or tone of faculty members on given issues
___ Works to create interdependence among staff members
___ Works to improve school climate (relationships)
___ Stands up for teachers
___ Involves parents in productive efforts with the school
___ Rewards positive patterns of behavior
___ Fosters collaboration and group efforts
___ Develops loyalty in staff
___ Supports staff consensus on issues
___ Works to enhance group efforts
___ Asks for faculty input
___ Makes teachers feel like they are working toward common goals
___ Maintains communication which is candid and productive
___ Maintains productive relationships with students
___ Maintains productive relationships with parents
___ Effectively redirects negative patterns of behavior
___ Celebrates/recognizes other's accomplishments
___ Shares decision-making with teachers and other school staff members
___ Empowers faculty to make decisions not bound by principal's possible censure

Delegation

___ Delegates responsibility to others
___ Trusts teachers to make mature judgements
___ Gives teachers a sense of professional autonomy
___ Creates opportunities for teachers to maximize their potential
___ Stimulates teachers to use their intellect and creativeness
___ Involves faculty in the development of school rules and regulations
___ Enables others to act on their own
___ Uses a committee approach to decision-making
___ Shares power with faculty
___ Gets things done, but doesn't do everything alone
___ Delegates authority and provides backing for those given the authority
___ Acknowledges the skills and intellect of faculty
___ Causes me to want to volunteer for extra responsibility

Personal Qualities

___ Works with staff in collegial, non-threatening ways
___ Understands people
___ Demonstrates knowledge of school administration

___ Makes decisions and follows through
___ Works well with individuals and groups
___ Demonstrates personal warmth and caring
___ Is inspiring to others
___ Acts as a positive catalyst to get things done
___ Sets a good example for teachers and others
___ Stays well-informed about school issues
___ Is patient
___ Tolerates stress well without taking it out on others
___ Is friendly
___ Uses time effectively
___ Has good organizational skills
___ Exercises good judgement
___ Spends the time it takes to get the job done
___ Uses a democratic approach
___ Is persuasive
___ Takes a risk when it could benefit students or school
___ Is open and candid with others
___ Is flexible (able to "roll with the punches")
___ Is honest
___ Has good planning skills
___ Is effective
___ Is fair
___ Has good problem solving abilities
___ Is reliable
___ Accepts responsibility for her/his actions
___ Is dependable
___ Provides a good model for teachers
___ Is consistent
___ Has good communication skills
___ Is predictable
___ Is dynamic
___ Is decisive (in a good way)
___ Is resourceful
___ Is charismatic
___ Is intelligent
___ Is energetic
___ Is well-informed
___ Demonstrates perseverance (sticks to it until accomplished)
___ Is respected by staff
___ Has the staff's confidence
___ Relates well to the community

The following are qualities or actions which generally are considered negative. Please provide your perceptions of your principal using a scale of 5-1 with 5=very much so/often; 4=generally so; 3=sometimes/occasionally; 2=rarely; 1=not at all/never.

___ Paternalistic (treats us like children)
___ Lacks knowledge
___ Has poorly defined goals
___ Tells us what to do in a negative fashion
___ Ideas for improvement are always the principals
___ Indecisive
___ Hard-headed/stubborn
___ Authoritarian/dictatorial
___ Blames others
___ We fear retaliation by the principal
___ Intimidates faculty and others
___ Is satisfied with the status quo (is negative about change)
___ Provides poor evaluation of instruction
___ Does not provide help for teachers who need help in their classrooms
___ Supervision efforts are absent or non-productive
___ Communication is limited and formal (not productive)
___ Does not recognize or reward special accomplishments
___ The way to get along with him/her is to conform
___ I and most of the faculty avoid contact with the principal/assistant principal
___ Is aggressive in a negative way
___ Is arrogant
___ Is lazy
___ Lacks expertise
___ Lacks direction
___ Lacks commitment
___ Is ambiguous
___ Is unduly critical
___ Is not accessible
___ Is manipulative
___ Plays favorites
___ Is defensive